

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1                   1.       (Previously presented) A stringed instrument comprising:  
2                   a solid body having exposed front and rear surfaces;  
3                   a tuning mechanism;  
4                   a neck having one end joined to said body and an opposite end retaining said  
5 tuning mechanism;  
6                   a retainer block distinct from and encompassed by said rear surface; and  
7                   a plurality of strings each having a first end secured to said tuning mechanism;  
8 and a second end retained by said retainer block.

1                   2.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 including a bridge  
2 mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning mechanism, over  
3 said bridge, and through said body to said block.

1                   3.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 2 wherein said  
2 retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of channels  
3 extending between said inner and outer surfaces, and each of said strings passes through a  
4 different one of said channels.

1                   4.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 3 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   5.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 4 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   6.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 wherein said block  
2 is unitary and made of brass.

1                   7.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 6 including a bridge  
2 mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning mechanism, over  
3 said bridge, and through said body to said block.

1                   8.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 7 wherein said  
2 retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of channels  
3 extending between said inner and outer surfaces, each of said strings passes through a different  
4 one of said channels.

1                   9.       (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 8 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   10.     (Original) A string instrument according to claim 9 wherein each of said  
2 channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   11.     (Original) A string instrument according to claim 3 wherein said body  
2 defines a cavity retaining said block and intersecting said rear surface.

1                   12.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   13.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 12 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   14.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said  
2 block is unitary and made of brass.

1                   15.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 14 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   16.     (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 15 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   17.     (New) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 wherein the solid  
2 body defines a slot from the front surface through the body, and wherein the plurality of strings  
3 extend through the slot